

EPA test reveals high lead in Raritan life

No set standards for aquatic animals

BY ALIYAH SHAHID
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Tests on mussels, clams and foraging fish in the Raritan Bay, near the Laurence Harbor Sea Wall in Old Bridge, have revealed high levels of lead, the Environmental Protection Agency reported yesterday.

Fishermen, who have been eating fish caught from Raritan Bay for years, expressed their concerns Thursday at a meeting at Keyport Borough Hall, before the new test results were available.

The amount of lead found in ribbed mussels ranged from 3 to 8.6 parts per million. In softshell clams the amount ranged from 3.4 to 17 parts per million and hardshell clams from 1.7 to 3.1 parts per million. In foraging fish or bait fish the amount of lead found ranged from 0.49 to 0.92 parts per million.

Currently, there is no standard for safe levels of lead in these marine animals, said Calliope C. Alexander, an environmental scientist for New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

However, Sharon Kubiak, a program specialist from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, said there is no safe level of lead in a child's body.

"This is very dangerous," said Peter Defur, a biologist and environmental consultant for Environmental Stewardship Concepts based in Richmond, Va., who works on contaminated sites. "I've never seen such high numbers in the 30 years I've been doing this."

Robert Spiegel, executive director of the Edison Wetlands Association, a nonprofit environmental organization, said the numbers are alarming. "This is just the tip of the iceberg. We don't know how far up the food chain this goes."

Extreme exposure to lead can cause neurological damage, kidney disease, cardiovascular problems and reproductive toxicity, according to the EPA Web site.

Two months ago, the EPA reported high levels of lead in three waterfront sites along Raritan Bay in Old Bridge and Sayreville. The EPA fenced off the areas and prohibited fishing.

Officials in Old Bridge and Sayreville have blamed the contamination on National Lead Industries, which had a paint manufacturing facility in Sayreville for decades. Several smelting operations along the Raritan from the late 1800s to the mid 1900s are also cited.

More than 50 worried fishermen, residents and delegates from Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6th Dist.) and U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) attended the meeting,

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which was organized by environmental groups NY/NJ Baykeeper and the Bayshore Regional Watershed Council.

"I've been fishing in these waters my entire life," said Raymond Swoboda Jr., 40, of Edison. "These are bait we use to catch fish, and we've been eating those fish."

Representatives from the EPA, DEP, state Department of Health and Senior Services and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry updated the audience and initiated a question-and-answer session.

In the earlier tests, the EPA said the water and sediment around the western jetty near Cheesapeake Creek revealed lead levels of 198,000 parts per million, nearly 500 times the residential limit of 400 parts per million. Average lead levels in that general area were 52,399 parts per million.

At the Laurence Harbor sea wall area, the range of lead was as high as 142,000 parts per million. At the half-acre beach area in Sayreville, just north of the Cheesapeake Creek jetty, lead readings were also 142,000 parts per million.

Signs and approximately 4,200

feet of fence have been erected around the areas. But the fencing isn't keeping everyone out, acknowledged Andrew L. Conforti, who is heading the EPA cleanup.

"We've had kids tearing down the fence at night," he said. "Day after day we put it up and they tear it down." Conforti said they are working with police to upgrade a camera system there and to beef up patrols.

While many fishermen and residents applauded the EPA's efforts, some argued for more. Others said the efforts created an eyesore from their properties, which they fear are dropping in value.

Officials from the EPA acknowledged the cleanup would take several years.

Still, Swoboda said he was worried. "What does this say," he asked, "to an individual like me who has eaten everything" in the Raritan. "What does this say about the lead levels in my body?"

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Start courthouse fight after killer sentenced

Death in Franklin Twp.

was connected to Martinez walked toward an elevator, the shouting started and fists began to fly. One man was punched in the back of his head several times before county Sheriff's Capt. Jeff Thompson, a Bound Brook councilman, broke up the fight. One man was later taken into custody for his role in the fight.

Defense attorney Christopher Kazlou said the man who was hit in the head was just trying to break up the fight. Thompson was cut on the neck during the scuffle.

The altercation came at the conclusion of two trials for Martinez, who was accused in the attacks outside the Clarion Suites Hotel in Franklin where a series of bloody fights had erupted. In May 2008, he was convicted of aggravated assault and weapons charges. The jury in that trial was unable to agree on the most serious charge against Martinez — aggravated manslaughter. He was convicted on the lesser count of reckless manslaughter in a second trial this year and was sentenced yesterday to eight years for that crime, 85 percent of which is to be served without parole.

Butler's mother, Cecelia Daly, gave an emotional speech before Superior Court Judge Edward Coleman handed down sentencing.

"I think of him every day," Daly said of her 23-year-old son, crying as she read the statement. "I shed many tears and will continue to shed many tears as the pain of his loss will never go away."

She called Martinez a "heartless person" who took away an uncle, son, cousin, father and loyal friend. He showed no remorse or concern during the trial, Daly said. "At this time I do not forgive him and I probably never will," she said.

Martinez later stood in court wearing a dark suit, his hands cuffed to a belt around his waste, and said he struggled to find words because nothing he could say would bring Butler back. Responding to Daly, he sent his "deepest apology" to the family and said he prays to God for forgiveness.

"I know it says in the Bible, 'forgive those who sin against you,'" Martinez said. "I hope one day they'll forgive me."

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